

State of Connecticut - Appropriations Committee

Budget Hearing on UConn Health

February 15, 2017

Testimony of Michel L. Guéret

I much appreciate the opportunity to address this committee and, hopefully, illustrate a narrative of advanced and cutting edge medicine being practiced at UConn Health, which in so doing is bringing hope and opening up possibilities where previously there were few.

During the summer of 2012, while I was hospitalized at UConn John Dempsey for a collapsed lung. At that time I was diagnosed with advanced stage lung cancer. The sizeable tumor consumed a large portion of the lung, making surgical excision impossible. Notwithstanding my initial trepidation regarding the anticipated side effects vs. perceived limited benefits, I underwent several rounds of chemotherapy and radiation to control the cancer's growth. The benefits of the treatment, while real, were temporary as the cancer metastasized. With stage four/terminal cancer, my remaining life expectancy was less than 12 months. I was exceedingly fortunate then that Dr. Jeffrey Wasser, medical director of clinical research at the UConn Cancer Center, was able to offer an alternative. Participation in a very early (phase 1) clinical trial exploring immunotherapy - the use of one's own immune system to destroy cancer cells. UConn Health is the only medical center in Connecticut that accrued patients into this national study. As I had little runway left, and diminishing returns were very real for one more round of chemotherapy, the decision to participate in the clinical trial – notwithstanding the unknown - was not a difficult one.

As a result of my participation in this clinical trial, my cancer has regressed very substantially, the prospect for long term management of the disease is real and I live a perfectly normal life without meaningful limitations.

This result was achieved in no small measure because I was fortunate enough to be treated at a medical institution where research and its practical applicability to patient care is an intrinsic component of its mission. UConn Health's commitment and success in this endeavor was self evident to me as a patient. Clearing the hurdles, as a small regional medical center, to achieve sufficient stature in the medical/pharmaceutical research community and obtain or be invited to participate in national, very expensive and yes – to some degree – prestigious clinic trials is not easy. As a matter of fact it uncontrovertibly speaks to the quality of the research being practiced. In short, UConn Health clearly punches above its weight.

Immunotherapy represents a sea change for the treatment of cancer, while it nonetheless is still very early on in truly understanding it – Dr. Jeffrey Wasser / UCHC. Even so it is highly likely that the treatment and outcome of cancer in the not too distant future will not only be different but very much better than it is today. UConn Health and by extension Connecticut can and should play a role in what would most certainly qualify as a game changer.

My survival, literally against all odds, is the real testimony. It is evidence of what a research driven UConn Health can and will continue to deliver to the people of Connecticut with your continued unwavering support.

I thank each member of the committee for standing up to safeguard Uconn Health. With your support - one day in the future – they will be there to save your life or that of your loved one in need ---just like they saved my life.